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Critics Find CIA Subsidies Hard to Replace

Some pretty smart and powerful Americans are concluding, ruefully, that the nasty old Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) isn't as easy to replace as they thought.

Men who got swept up in a wave of anti-CIA idealism months ago aren't so sure of their grounds now that they stand face to face with some pragmatic problems of national interest and survival.

I refer, of course, to the revelations that CIA was covertly financing student groups and a host of other voluntary, or private, organizations. American indignation at that time was so great that President Johnson ordered CIA out of the "covert support" business insofar as educational, cultural and similar groups are concerned.

Then a high-powered committee set about trying to fashion some kind of clean, above-board financing of these groups. The committee has found that idealistic talk is easy, but that it doesn't meet certain ideological challenges.

The first fact of life that the committee is up against is that the Soviet Union is still spending hundreds of millions of dollars a year, much of it covertly, to influence political parties, labor unions, student organizations, journalistic societies and many similar groups all over the world.

If the committee were to report the whole truth, which it isn't likely to, it would admit that it can't conceive of any nice, clean, genteel, open-and-above-board system for effectively doing what the CIA was.

Let private groups send students to international conferences to do intellectual battles with Communist-financed students? Well, it turns out that "private money" exists more in the talking than in the hour of need.

More important, student groups have a vital backup of intelligence and other information about who their adversaries were, who was helping them and what the foes were trying to do when the CIA was subsidizing them.

To send American kids off harum-scarum to a "world youth festival" in, say, Prague or Warsaw now, backed by little more than the cash of some

well-meaning private group, would be like sending Central High's football team out to play the Los Angeles Rams.

Then, there is the ugly reality that sometimes the groups needing a subsidy are foreign organizations in country X, whose members do not have the resources to combat groups that are heavily financed by the Soviet Union or Communist China.

The groups on "our side" are eager to use U.S. money to fight democracy's battles. But when the opposition's funds are given secretly, pro-democratic groups simply cannot afford to take money openly from a quasi-public U.S. organization—nor from a private group, for that matter.

"Why must we try to match Communists in their dirty tactics?" someone surely asks.

Because we want to win.

Some Americans pretend that we only play the game cleanly, not caring whether we win or lose. The truth is that it is an American tradition to win.

This desire to win has been bothering some of the idealists on the committee trying to figure out what to do for, with or about the moneyless groups they call "CIA orphans."

They have tried to forget this dilemma by indulging in a big fight over whether or not to create a huge quasi-public commission and give to it certain functions now performed by the State Department Cultural Affairs Bureau, and by the U.S. Information Agency.

The committee has given Sen. William Fulbright,

D-Ark., a forum for his pet theory that exchanges of students and professors and other educational and cultural activities ought to be removed from the taint of USIA's propaganda orientation, and from the contamination of State Department's policy.

But a new commission set up under these squeamish notions would certainly be no replacement for CIA. For how could it tarnish its sweet intellectual innocence by sending students, neighbors or others off to do dirty, polemical battles with the Communists?

The committee probably will reach agreement in January. But don't you believe for a moment that it will produce a sanitary way of doing some of this nation's vital business in a mean and sordid world.

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